

The Deming Headlight- August 3, 2010

By Matt Robinson

DEMING- Local veterans' interest organizations have teamed with the city of Deming to fix the desecration of graves at the Mountain View Cemetery.

Nine graves -- all the final resting places for U.S. military veterans -- were desecrated about two week ago. The desecration included the removal of brass plaques on the gravestones. The perpetrators are at large.

In response to the desecration, the city has stepped up surveillance in the area, including the addition of extra patrols by the Deming Police Department. However, following a Monday morning meeting between the city and local groups, at least one veteran leader is looking for more action.

"It seems that they're more interested in replacing the things than they are in putting in security to stop this from happening again," Hector Palacio, Commander of the Veterans of Foreign Wars Post No. 1477, said.

Dick Hamilton, adjutant of American Legion Bataan Post No. 4, also attended the meeting. In his eyes, the desecrations are not attacks on veterans, but more-than-likely a misguided attempt at raising a few bucks.

"Actually, what I think it is is probably crack heads selling the bronze," he said. "That plaque is five, six pounds, at least, of bronze."

Palacio agreed with Hamilton's thought on the stolen plaques and added that "the veterans are

pissed."

City administrator Richard McInturff -- with whom local groups met -- has previously said increased surveillance at the cemetery includes cameras and police patrols.

"It's been about two weeks now without further incident," he added.

He said the city would use its contacts within the federal government to pursue replacing the plaques. As of Monday afternoon, a small ray of sunshine was opened over the gloom caused by local thieves.

Kara Kelber, press secretary for Congressman Harry Teague, said the congressman has already been in contact with the Veterans' Administration to fix the problem. She said once the details of the events have been worked out, the VA has "assured the congressman" that new headstones will be replaced "within weeks."

"Our first priority needs to be to make this right for our veterans and their families, and my office is already working with Deming officials, local veterans organizations, and the VA to repair or replace the headstones that have been damaged at Mountain View Cemetery," Congressman Teague said in a statement. "What these criminals did goes beyond just property damage -- they harmed the resting place and the legacy of people I consider to be American heroes."

Palacio credited Teague for his continued support of veterans.

Marissa Padilla, of Senator Tom Udall's office, said the senator's office and its staff are working with a series of ideas that might be able to replace the headstones with grant funding.

"Our office has reached out, and we'll be doing our best to help make this whole," she added.

Locals are asked to keep a keen eye out for any suspicious activity in the area and to contact the authorities if any mischievous deeds are witnessed.